

VILLAGE VIEW

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Had William Shakespeare been living on Cape Cod when composing his sonnet that contains the line, "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May," he might have written the poem quite differently. Surely, Shakespeare would have found that, in this climate, rough winds shake the darling buds in April!!

No month of the year promises more than April. And, even though it sometimes seems her promises are empty ones, that those rough winds bring only rain, an occasional final snow-storm, or now and then a tempest, you may depend on April's promises. She's busy bringing us May.

And busy she is! An April morning dawns, awash with gold light, and glistens. Early hours are noisy with birdsong. Drying breezes blow through soggy carpets of fallen leaves as towhees, fussy as housewives at spring cleaning, turn and flick each leaf.

Bouncing, running, pausing robins work the lawns. Chickadees forsake the feeder to perform acrobatics in branches overhead. Redwing blackbirds, already nesting among reeds and rushes of marshes, range nearby uplands, foraging for fledglings' food.

Among the grasses, a pair of quail lead a platoon of chicks. Each tiny fluff of feathers resembles an ambulatory pine cone; each is endowed with an innate ability to be virtually invisible the instant danger threatens.

From some snug hibernation, a chipmunk ventures forth testing April's promise. Did this sprightly rodent shelter in the woodpile's rotting base-logs since last December's frosts and snows? Or, perhaps, did the bright-eyed fellow curl in cozy slumber beneath the concrete step, awaiting signals only chipmunks hear when April whistles?

Essences of fertile earth rise from underfoot; steamy odors, rich and full, smell of sprouting seeds and threadlike roots squirming through grainy soil. Such richness almost tickles the tongue with flavors of early peas and salad greens.

Higher climbs April's sun until, at noon, its rays beam like a lover's smile, nudging sluggish earthworms to writhing life beneath the ground's surface. Those wrigglers churn the soil, loosen packed ground, cut channels where grassroots seek to plunge. Worms, their segmented pink-gray slenderness engrossed in mini-agri-business, aerate the soil.

Winter-yellowed mosses, overnight, turn emerald. Arbutus buds, dark brown points tightly wrapped, relax on sun-warmed banks, their star-shaped faces releasing heady perfumes to drift and mingle with April's scents.

Rivers and streams, but lately broken from winter's frozen grasp, rush toward the ocean, gurgling freedom's joy. And alewives, called herring, run inland to spawn in waters of their birth. Each foot-long flipping struggler against the currents flow fights upstream unerringly, its driving energies bent singlemindedly upon reaching the quiet of pond or lake above. Imprinted on their brains the day the fry emerged from their tiny egg-sacs and floated down to the sea, this lake, that pond, is the only one that calls each individual fish to return.

And on the river banks await the gulls, eyes on the fish battling the flood, on the finny shapes flinging themselves over dams, on the leaping host laddering the stepping stones in homeward climb. To satisfy voracious appetites, the birds snatch at weary, weakening fish, carry off many a hapless herring to fill the maws of waiting baby gulls huddled in rude nests amid the dunes.

On the stream's edge, too, men and boys with dipnets take a toll. Sunbeams splinter against gleaming silver fishscales as herring take the jumps. Underwater, their shadow-brown bodies slither and twist, sometimes hover, quivering in the sluiceway, inches above the clean-washed pebbles of the riverbed. Sunlight, filtered through branches overhanging the dappled water, glints and shifts to camouflage the fish.

Industrious April! Is there a busier time than this promising month? Her achievements are but partially listed now. Those darling buds, Shakespeare wrote about, swell to bursting color.

Snowdrops and crocus poke through lingering rime, push above blanketing pine needles, thrust spiky blades through crusty surfaces of garden beds in April. Green shoots soon show bulging buds expanding. Jonquils, squill, hyacinths rise on lengthening stems and ripen to bloom.

Daffodils, curling open golden petals, turn fresh faces in aureate semi-circles, from east in the morning, to south as the sun reaches its zenith, and to the western sky as evening falls. Through squalls of rain, through nights of frost, through day-long clouds, these April ballerinas nod and dance to symphonic notes we cannot hear. Rhythm and beat, though soundless to our ears, play upon our souls even as narcissus leap and frolic, bend and bow, and sprinkle their own sweetnesses into passing airs.

Fickle April! No sooner do we trust her than we are betrayed. From unexpected quarter blow darkling cloud and freezing rain. Dash for cover! Raise umbrellas, like mushrooms, to showery skies. As quickly as a child's mischief, rains and winds abate.

Peeking from behind a woolen cloud, the sun smiles contritely. April seems to ask, "Wasn't that fun?" And, with whimsy, promises brighter, longer tomorrows.

Shakespeare's darling buds, for us, are April's, as are her smiles and tears. No time toils more zealously to usher in sweet May.